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Student name: Duane Millien  
Student ID no.: 816027748  
Degree Program: BA Spanish  
Supervisor: Dr. Anne-Marie Pouchet PhD

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A study behind the principal factors of why the importance of learning a foreign language in Trinidad fades away after Secondary level education.

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**Declaration**

1. I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.
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## **ABSTRACT**

This research project delves into the principal factors contributing to the diminishing importance of foreign language learning in Trinidad and Tobago after secondary education. Through a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and interviews, this study explores the perspectives of both students and educators regarding language learning motivations, challenges, and attitudes. Additionally, educational policies related to foreign language instruction in Trinidad and Tobago are analyzed to understand their impact on language learning trends. The findings shed light on the implications of this trend for national and regional development, emphasizing the significance of language proficiency in diverse sectors such as tourism, trade, and international relations.

### **Keywords:**

Trinidad and Tobago, foreign language education, language learning, secondary education, curriculum, educator perspectives, educational policies, regional development, language proficiency, cultural diversity.

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## **Introduction:**

Behind the harmonious curtains of Trinidad and Tobago's cultural diversity, the reflection of strong and diverse linguistic influence is observed through each community. A pure blend of culture, where all sorts of variations of Spanish and French creole all capture the essence of an English-speaking nation that proudly boasts its multicultural heritage. However, amidst this linguistic concord, an intriguing anomaly surfaces. Any culture spreading its wings throughout history, surely raises the question of preservation and how practices have been maintained within the society today. In order to fully understand whether these are being preserved, one must fully comprehend the core of how these practices are not only taught, but learnt and processed. For example, when it comes to the practice of learning a foreign language, one must simply delve into the complexities of the foreign language educational system, should there be a functional one. This exploration raises an ample amount of questions, such as how often this practice is not only observed, but the result of this learning is reflected into the society, whether on an intimate or communal level. Although according to Hoyte West, "the government of Trinidad & Tobago has designated Spanish as the country's official foreign language"<sup>1</sup>, it is difficult to escape the supposition that this language is hardly spoken outside of educational or professional institutions. Coincidentally, this is evident when looking at the 2005 introduction of the SAFFL (Spanish as a First foreign Language) initiative in Trinidad and Tobago by the SIS (Secretariat for the Implementation of Spanish). According to the official government website of the SIS, this project originally carried the goal of strengthening the citizens' effective use of the foreign

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<sup>1</sup>1. Hoyte-West, Antony. "Spanish and Creole: Exploring Aspects of Minority and Minoritised Languages in Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago." *Adeptus (Warszawa)*, no. 19, (2022): 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.11649/a.2722>

language "by the year 2020" <sup>2</sup>, however this effectiveness is to indeed be questioned almost 4 years later. Trinidad and Tobago's educational system, shaped by sociocultural and historical factors, introduces students to foreign languages during their formative years. Although some primary education institutions have recently taken the initiative to introduce languages like Spanish into their curriculum, the majority of the educational institutions actually begin the teachings and carry out governmental evaluations of foreign languages at the secondary level. Therefore, it is pivotal to understand the level of importance this secondary education holds, in terms of its contribution to a society. One can observe for example the gradual fading away of the importance of learning a foreign language after the secondary level of education. When examining the 2021-22 UWI ST. Augustine Annual Report, it's noted that at the Undergraduate level, Humanities & Education was the faculty that "experienced the sharpest decline of 18%" <sup>3</sup>, and understandably so as the years would've forecasted when examining the 2015-2019 UWI Student Statistical Digest. The report highlights that in the academic year 2016/17, the programmes BA Spanish and BA French enrollment numbers were 99 and 32 respectively, compared to a decreased 85 and 27 in the year 2018/19<sup>4</sup>. This trend raises critical questions surrounding the factors influencing language learning priorities and the consequences of this decline. This research project seeks not only to unravel the motives and challenges from the perspective of the student, but will also examine existing educational phenomena in the country, as well as discuss the significant impact of these findings on a national and broader regional landscape.

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<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Education. "Secretariat for the Implementation of Spanish (SIS)." Ministry of Education. <https://www.moe.gov.tt/spanish-implementation-secretariat-sis/>

<sup>3</sup> 3. UWI STA, "Annual Report 2021-22" [https://sta.uwi.edu/resources/documents/UWI\\_AnnualReport\\_21\\_22.pdf](https://sta.uwi.edu/resources/documents/UWI_AnnualReport_21_22.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> UWI STA, "Student Digestical Student Statistical Digest 2015/2016 to 2019/2020" [https://sta.uwi.edu/resources/documents/statistics/Student\\_Statistics\\_15\\_16-19\\_20.pdf](https://sta.uwi.edu/resources/documents/statistics/Student_Statistics_15_16-19_20.pdf)

**Rationale:**

The reasoning for this study would be to explore and enhance documentation on the underlying national and regional impact that the dwindling trend of studying foreign languages at a post-secondary level carries, especially to the students, educators, and educative coordinators.

**Parameters:**

Here are the principal parameters which fundamentally brings forth the relevant research of this project:

Chronology - The research was done within a 6-7 month timeframe, as information was carefully gathered by relevant sources.

Geography - The study is limited to mainly Trinidad & Tobago, despite the issue having regional and global impact.

Themes - Motivation for wanting to learn a foreign language in the country, is one of the main themes, both from a student and educator perspective.

People - Focus is mainly on those that had an encounter with a foreign language at secondary school, but is not limited to only these individuals as results from the survey show too that individuals never even had the opportunity to interact with these languages even at secondary level.

**Objectives:**

The objectives of this project include the following:

- To investigate the attitudes of both past and present secondary and tertiary-level students toward foreign language learning.
- To identify the challenges faced by educators at both second and tertiary-level in promoting foreign language education.
- To analyze existing educational policies related to foreign language instruction in Trinidad and Tobago.
- To examine the impact that this phenomenon has on regionalization and nationalism.

### **Methodology:**

This research paper will be approached through collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. Primarily, data was gathered through a Google Forms survey sent out to current and past secondary schools, within a specific demographic of Trinidad & Tobago. This specific demographic turned out to be individuals between the age of 16-29, including students from 8 different secondary schools (North, East and Central Zone), those currently enrolled at the University of the West Indies (UWI) and the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), together with those now fully employed at companies, and those self-employed. Southern secondary schools were not excluded for any specific reason, except that students from the other regions eagerly took up all 120 survey slots. The survey itself sought to gather information concerning the general experience, attitudes, motives, challenges and intentions of individuals towards learning a foreign language like Spanish or French. It is important to note that not all questions in the survey were mandatory, and the questions were designed to capture extremely open-ended data.

Further qualitative data was gathered through direct interviews with secondary school Spanish teacher Kayla Millien at St. Joseph's Convent San Fernando, as well as columnist, political analyst and linguist Dr. Winford James. This is set to understand the perspective of the educators as well as the motivators and challenges that they also face in today's world.

Additionally to the above primary sources, secondary sources such as online databases and libraries that explore similar phenomena, as well as previous works from previous projects, were all utilized in order to compare and analyze existing data to the findings in the project, making several observations and drawing new conclusions.

### **Chapter Outline:**

This study consists of three main chapters. Chapter 1, entitled "The student POV", seeks to understand the perspective of the students, and their main reasons why they have or have not engaged in learning a foreign language. Chapter 2, entitled "The educative POV", will seek to understand the perspective of the educators and examine the educational policies. Chapter 3 "Impact", will then discuss its national and global impact of the findings of the previous 2 chapters.

### **Limitations**

The two main limitations for this project was that I usually work 48 hours a week, as well as I suffered an ankle injury in December 2023, preventing me from being able to walk for 3 weeks. Several teachers from schools of different zones were all contacted, however time was the main hindrance, as when I would be off from both work and classes, the teachers would have previous engagements, commitments, etc. This made the educative perspective a bit more limited, but certainly did not make any less valuable, the contributions that were indeed made.

## **Chapter 1: The Student POV**

In order to inquisitively dive into the matter of individuals not wanting to pursue foreign language studies beyond the secondary level, one must certainly be knowledgeable of the individuals themselves and what their experience is like. The purpose of having this research not only include students that are currently enrolled in secondary school but also include past students is to observe behavioural evolution within the society in question. Notably, the overall experience captured from the students' perspective may encourage individuals observing to draw conclusions based on what is understood. However, some may argue that the true essence of understanding the student experience would be understanding what can explain their possible motives or reasons for choices made on the subject, their current attitudes towards language learning, and possible hardships or motivations issued in the process. To begin, the research performed principally focuses on when the majority of individuals are first introduced to these linguistic ideologies on a compulsory level. Resultantly, it is noteworthy to gather that within Trinidad and Tobago, individuals are granted the opportunity to learn foreign languages such as Spanish and French, principally beginning in secondary school; however, "selected primary schools also have piloted Spanish" <sup>5</sup>. As aforementioned, the student sample that this research has included hails from a mixture of 120 current and past students of secondary schools in

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<sup>5</sup> Morton-Gittens, Mala, and Peter Smith. "Country Chapters: TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO." *PIRLS 2016 Encyclopedia*, Boston College, TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, (2016): 3.  
<https://pirls2016.org/wp-content/uploads/encyclopedia-pirls/downloadcenter/3.%20Country%20Chapters/Trinidad%20and%20Tobago.pdf>. Accessed 26 Nov. 2023.

Trinidad and Tobago, ranging between the ages of 16 and 29. This demographic eventually converts itself into a well-balanced representation, and although the individuals themselves were not specifically selected, they did indeed bring forth an important modern apprehension by bringing forth both quantitative information, but also including open ended questions in order to ensure quality of opinion. The discussion and analysis of this survey was undertaken through the various sections of the survey itself, entitled "Demographic", "Prior Foreign Language Learning Experience", "Attitudes Toward Foreign Language Learning", "Motivations for Learning a Foreign Language", "Barriers or Challenges to Learning a Foreign Language", "Influence of Cultural Background", "Perception of Language Diversity in Trinidad and Tobago" and "Future Intention". Commencing with the first section entitled "Demographic", which sought to capture fundamental data from the sample group themselves such as age, gender, current level of education/ furthest level of education reached, as well as their occupation if applicable. The lower limit of the age group was selected as this is the typical age that students in secondary school no longer mandatorily undertake studies in specific subjects as they transition between Forms 3 and 4, whereas the upper limit of 29 intends to reinforce the importance of a modern study. Additionally, as seen below in Figure IMG1.0, gender was not specifically a motive or factor when delivering the surveys, although, as seen, males were the more participative gender.

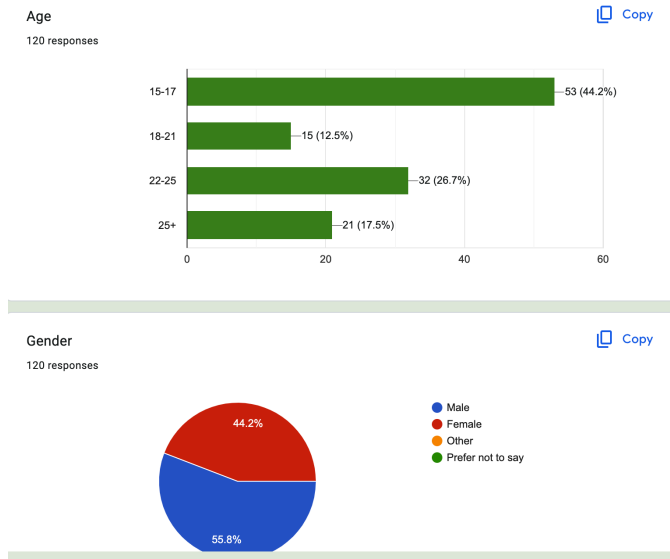


Figure IMG1.0 - Statistical data from survey showing the age and gender range.

As previously mentioned, students from various secondary schools from both the East-West and North-South corridors participated in the survey, and to emphasize, the specific students were not selected based on any criteria barring the fact that they attended the secondary school and would have been exposed or not to foreign language education. Co-existing with the fact that out of 120 participants, the majority were actually individuals that at furthest reached secondary education, principally due to age. The importance of this cannot be stressed enough, and in agreement with Okogbaa, "feedback from students is very important"<sup>6</sup> when it comes to dealing with any type of quality assurance pertaining to education. On the other hand, those who belonged to the older age categories and were employed hailed from diverse job sectors, such as the beauty industry, medicine, information technology, the aviation industry, and many more. There was no specific reason for selection of these industries. Next, the crucial examination of the student experience began. This mainly sought to understand whether individuals had primarily encountered the

<sup>6</sup> Okogbaa, Veronica. "Quality in Higher Education: The Need for Feedback from Students." *Journal of Education and Practice* 7.32, (2016): 139-143.

teaching of at least one foreign language in secondary education, such as Spanish or French. The below Figure IMG 1.1 captures the statistical evidence of these findings.

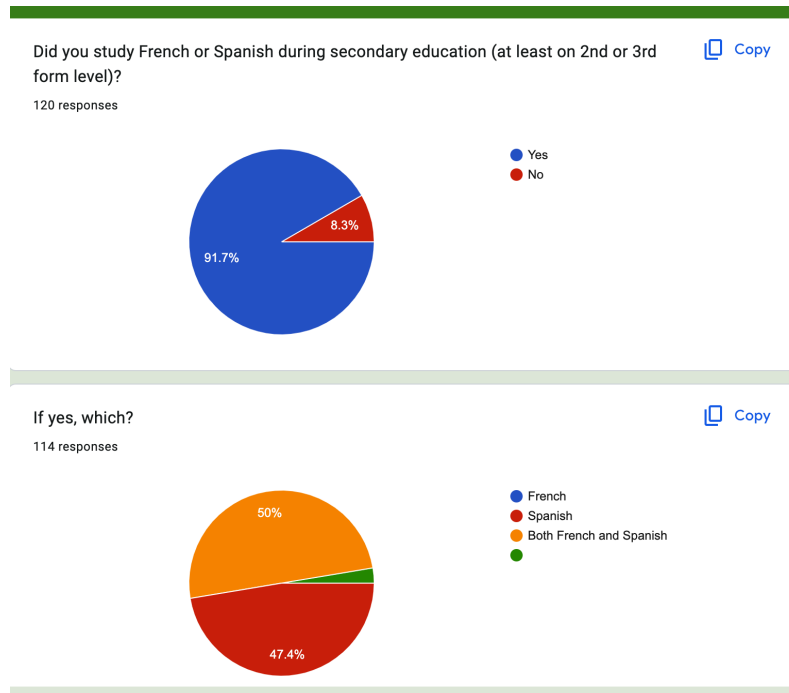


Figure IMG1.1

Statistical data from survey showing the percentage of students having studied French or Spanish during secondary school.

On a commendatory note, 110/120 participants (91.7%) advised that at least one foreign language was available to learn during secondary education, which paints a positive image from the educator perspective. Importantly, on the flip side, the remaining participants all decided to provide reasoning as to why they were unable to, which counteracts the previous point, as evidently the chief circumstance that foreign language education was not developed was that the particular secondary school simply did not have the capabilities to offer one of these subjects for one reason or another.

On a scale of 1 to 5, how positively do you perceive the importance of learning a foreign language beyond secondary education in Trinidad and Tobago?

120 responses

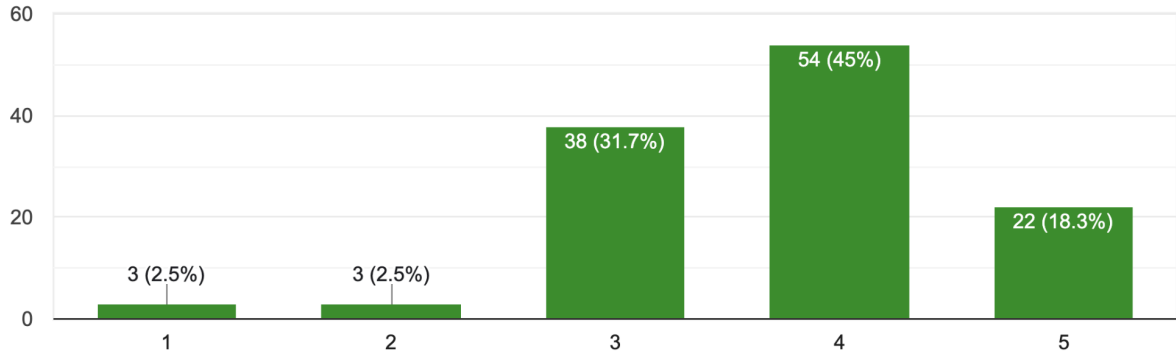


Figure IMG 1.2

Statistical data from survey showing the perceived importance of foreign language learning beyond secondary education

Another positive observation can be made, through the examination of the individuals' attitude towards the importance of learning a foreign language beyond secondary school. As observed in the above Figure IMG 1.2, based on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the least positive and 5 being the most, a total of 76 individuals (63.3%) placed the importance between 4-5, therefore carrying a moderately positive perception towards learning a foreign language after secondary school. On an even more encouraging note, although it does not appear as a mandatory question in the survey, the participants were then questioned about their opinion on possible benefits of learning a foreign language, in which there were a vast amount of varying responses, 26 to be exact. The responses ranged from "Travel benefits" and "Facilitating international communication" to "job opportunities" and "general broader scope of opportunities". The aforementioned worthwhile

responses clearly demonstrate more of an optimistic perspective from this sample group, sparking the perfect onset of the student POV conversation. It foreshadows certain questions such as what could possibly spark this current day lack of interest in the foreign language field at the university level, and why is it being abandoned even in some circumstances. Regardless, this demonstrates still quite a positive outlook on the society's views on this essential matter, however it cannot be ignored that 6 participants placed the importance between 1-2, offering a different yet important perspective on the matter.

In agreement with Mitchell, "A student's motivation to learn is considered one of the most crucial determinants of the success and quality of students' learning outcome" <sup>7</sup>. Thus, it is quintessential that what motivates individuals to want to learn a foreign language generally is of the utmost noteworthiness. It is significant to note that this section was only applicable to those that have learnt or are learning a foreign language at secondary school. Primarily, one must observe that 100 out of 120 participants provided feedback on their motivations for wanting to learn Spanish or French. It would not be far-fetched to propose that the remaining 20 simply did not feel motivated to want to learn, begging the question of whether psychological or sociocultural factors are involved. However, as per Figure IMG 1.3 below, one should pay close attention to the amount of responses pertaining to one's motivation being that it was mandatory to learn in school:

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<sup>7</sup> Mitchell Jr, J. V. "Interrelationships and predictive efficacy for indices of intrinsic, extrinsic, and self-assessed motivation for learning." *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, (1992): 25.

### Why did you choose to learn a foreign language?

100 responses

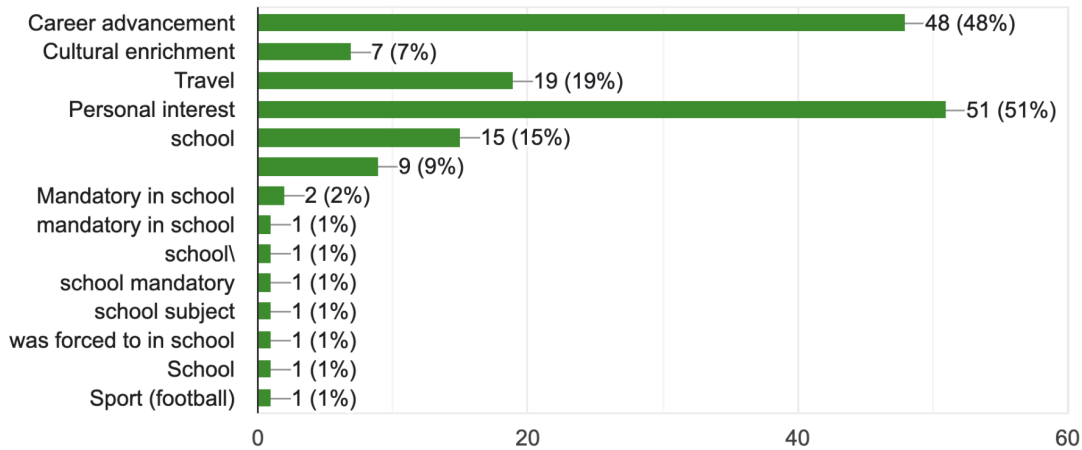


Figure IMG 1.3

Statistical data from survey showing the general reasons for studying foreign language.

A total of 23 individuals out of the above 100 participants (23%) advised that their sole motivation for learning a foreign language was that it was a mandatory subject in secondary school education. On the flip side, also in a constructive manner, the two highest motivations for wanting to learn were "Career advancement" (48) and "Personal interest" (51). This again advances the previously mentioned proposition that there still exists a positive standpoint and a general desire to want to learn, even furthering the inquiry of where it goes wrong at the post-secondary level. Other motivators were "travel" (19) and "cultural " (7), in which the influence of cultural background will be discussed further down in the discussion.

As vital as underlying individuals' motives and desires for this foreign language practice is, it is only just as essential to focus on barriers and challenges faced. In order to commence the process of drawing any sorts of conclusions from these findings, it is essential to first understand whether the findings discovered are caused by the individual themselves or by the facilitative factor, in this case being the educator. The responses varied amongst "Lack of time" (69.6% of individuals that voted), "General lack of interest for language" (28.3% of individuals that voted), and "Difficulty in grasping the language"(32.6% of individuals that voted), which all perceive that this could be due to the individual themselves. However, opposing responses such as "Limited resources or courses available" (69.6% of individuals that voted) and the majority of "Other" (15.2% of individuals that voted) responses stating that their choice of degree did noxt facilitate this for them, all suggest that part of the issue also includes factors from the educational system itself. This section was also only applicable to those that chose to stop learning after secondary education or have not been exposed enough in secondary school. The visual demonstration stands below in Figure IMG1.4:

What was the primary reason for NOT wanting to learn French/Spanish beyond secondary level?  
46 responses

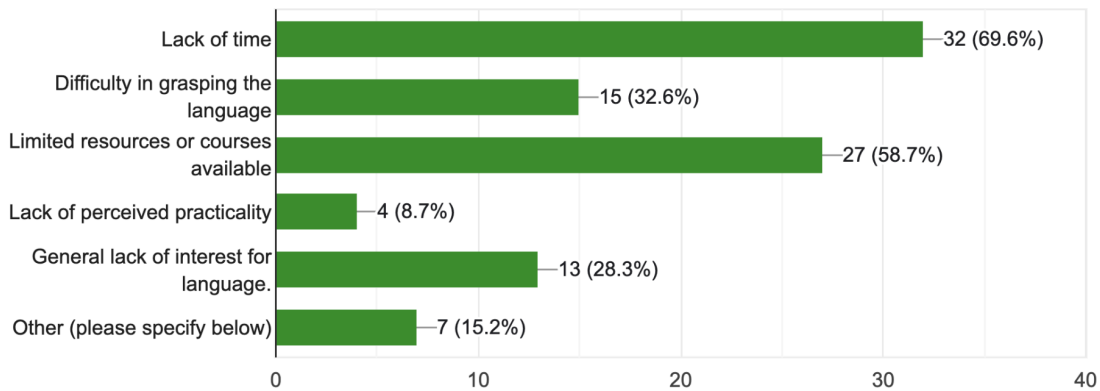


Figure IMG1.4

Statistical data from survey showing principle reasons for not wanting to pursue foreign language study beyond secondary education

Ultimately, one of the paramount factors to consider when capturing data from a sample group like this, would be to understand the cultural and sociocultural influences that will definitely affect language learning decision-making. Notably, out of all 120 participants, 73 persons (60.8%) rated their cultural background as a 1 in a 1-5 scale, with 5 representing the biggest influence. One may desire to consider geographical features of Trinidad & Tobago, observing its extremely near proximity to Latin America, and attempt to encounter some sort of sociohistorical explanation as to why at least the Spanish language is not as prominent as it could be between the twin islands. A total of 13 individuals rated their cultural influence between 4-5, hence illustrating that the issue is not thoroughly one sided. With the gradual influx of Venezuelan immigrants present all throughout the nation, it's difficult to suppose therefore that certain

persons were able to take it upon themselves, out of personal interest, to be involved in language learning. This is yet to be statistically or officially proven, but it is indeed difficult to escape suppositions like these.

Altogether, there are some absorbing conspiracies and even conclusions that can possibly be drawn based on the findings of this survey. One may examine from the very starting point, that a possible drastic issue does not lie in the availability of the foreign languages to individuals, or in most cases as the survey highlights, neither does it lie in the willingness of the individual to learn. This leads to a proposed supposition that the issue may lie instead in the quality of deliverance of this education, during these crucial stages for students to determine their subjects of study for the eventual Caribbean examinations. In essence, there is a blend of factors deriving from the individual themselves, together with their circumstances, but also from the educational side. The following chapter, "The educative POV" will be explored in much further detail as they will then have the opportunity to offer their perspective, but also their motives, challenges and much more.

## **Chapter 2: The Educative POV**

This chapter delves into the perspectives of educators and examines the educational policies surrounding foreign language, specifically Spanish, learning in Trinidad, whether existing or evolving. To briefly overview, in Trinidad and Tobago specifically, the Ministry of Education has implemented, for both primary and secondary level education, the Curriculum Planning and Development Division (CPDD). According to the Ministry themselves, the process of developing these curricula "may be more adequately described as designing, developing, implementing, monitoring, evaluating and reviewing curricula that are appropriate and relevant to the needs and interests of a developing nation, such as ours" <sup>8</sup>. One of the most interesting factors to consider is that the policies and curriculum developed over the years have evolved and shifted, in the sense that with the Westminster model that Trinidad and Tobago follows, where there is governmental change, there are certainly major or minor changes within the persons managing these policies, but also certain policies themselves. Specific to the Spanish Language curriculum, through the MOE's official Curriculum Guide, it can be observed that like most other curricula, structurally, teachers are provided with learning outcome topics, which are distributed not just throughout the different levels, but also to each school term. In the recently updated 2022 guide, it's seen that at the Primary school level, the main focus regarding foreign language learning in general is "primarily, but not exclusively, on spoken language", which involves "helping them to develop awareness of how language affects culture and vice versa". On the other hand, at the secondary and more advanced level, the CPDD emphasizes particular content standards, at least through Forms 1 to 3, involving the development of conversation, reading and writing, cultural awareness, etc. , according to the Ministry, all with the purpose of "suggesting

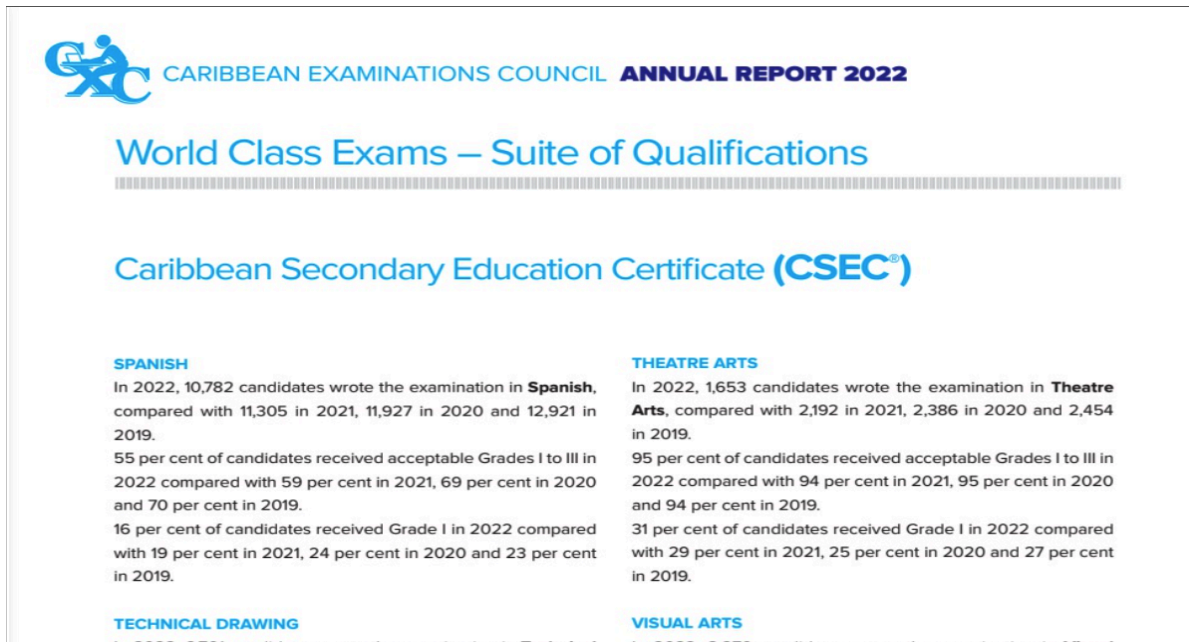
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<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Education. "Curriculum Planning and Development Division (CPDD)". <https://moe.gov.tt/curriculum-planning-and-development-division-cpdd/>.

the types of learning experiences that should be planned, and serving as benchmarks against which to measure improvement...over time" (MOE, 2022). It is equally essential, if one is investigating the effectiveness of how these goals will be carried out, to also shed light on the actual crew on the ship (the teachers), by understanding factors such as the policies in place and the qualifications needed to become a Spanish teacher at the secondary level. As per the CDPP's official "Criteria for Assessment of Qualifications for Teaching at the Secondary Level in Trinidad and Tobago" released document in 2019, in order for one to be capable of teaching Forms 1 to 6, one must apply themselves to be what's called a Teacher Three (T III) status, by successfully completing a Bachelor's degree in the field of study, as well as a post graduate diploma in Education. On the other hand, if an individual completes a minimum of 50% of the core area of study, they are then qualified to be what's called Teacher Two (T II) status, however these individuals are permitted to teach only up the CSEC (Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate) at Form 5.

As mentioned in the introduction, where there is society and culture, both preservation and evolution are essential factors to examine, in order to have a clearer overall understanding of how they function. One of the easiest ways to observe and learn about culture, apart from interacting with those directly involved, would be through the observation of patterns and trends, and what conclusions can be drawn from them. With respect to how the above processes and policies have evolved in any manner, with the overall curriculum development process in place, it certainly is not out of the norm to want to question its effectiveness over time, and one can do this by not just observing student grade trends, but by the number of candidates even able to

complete the Spanish examination process at the CSEC level. In terms of this, yet another downward trend is evident in the CXC Annual Reports<sup>9</sup> over the years in the number of candidates participating in the exam, as well as those able to achieve a Grade 1 to 3 in Spanish at the CSEC Level. Figures IMG 2.0 and IMG 2.1 below portray these dwindling percentages:



Figures IMG 2.0 and IMG 2.1

CXC Annual Report 2022 above and 2004 below

<sup>9</sup> Caribbean Examinations Council. "CXC Annual Report 2022". <https://www.cxc.org/cxc-annual-report-2022/>

### **Spanish (General)**

141. Sixty-nine percent of the candidates achieved Grades I to III in the 2004 examination. Candidates have continued to perform well in Paper 01 (Part-A) and Paper 03 which test their ability to understand and speak the language. However, while there has been evidence of very good performance in candidates' ability to write the language, in Paper 02, there is scope for improvement in both the reading and writing skills tested in Paper 01 (Part-B) as well as Paper 02.

### **Spanish (Basic)**

As seen above, in 2022, it was reported that 10,782 candidates were able to sit the examinations, and 55% of them received an acceptable Grade between I-III. However, this is a notable decline when observing previous years, such as 2019, where 12,921 candidates completed the exams and 70% of them received acceptable grades. Therefore, these results possibly raises concern if the current curriculum framework matches what the Ministry's intended outcome goals are? Do they also contribute to the discussion that the issue in question actually stems much earlier in the secondary school system, and not when it's time to select subjects in Form 4? In an attempt to gain a deeper insight from an educational point of view, separate one-on-one interviews were conducted with secondary school Spanish teacher Kayla Millien at St. Joseph's Convent (SJC) San Fernando, as well as columnist, political analyst, and linguist Dr. Winford James (full audios and transcribed versions of both interviews are found in Appendix). Millien has been teaching Spanish at Forms 1–5 at SJC San Fernando for about 3 years, but has also taught briefly at both St. Mary's College and Fatima College in Port-of-Spain. On the other hand, Dr. James has been a lecturer at UWI for 26 years, having achieved a PhD in Linguistics, BA in Spanish and French, and a 'Certificado de Aptitud' certificate from the University of Salamanca in Spain. of Dr James,

The intention of this selection was to include two individuals that had the hand- on Spanish teaching experience, but at much different eras. Dr. James also taught Spanish at Bishop Anstey High in Tobago. These interviews sought to reveal important insights, such as their observation of these dwindling trends, but also their perspective on the possible reasons why. When inquiring if the students are seen motivated and willing to select a foreign language at the fourth form level, Millien actually indicated that in SJC San Fernando, choosing a foreign language in Form 4 is mandatory. As seen in Chapter 1, this opens up a new perspective in the sense that it's quite contrasting to a plethora of other secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago, that don't even offer the subjects. Millien further went on to add "However, I do find that students... from Forms one to three are quite motivated in terms of they like the languages, particularly Spanish. They like the languages, however, I think the drawback there is that they don't see it as a lucrative subject to study further". Dr. James on the other hand, believes that the statistical decline has always existed, even up to 30 years ago, and he also attributes three main reasons for the decline itself. James, like Millien, firstly mentioned that the market, in Trinidad at least, is not cut out for a foreign language to be a main field of study. "Employment opportunities are not particularly great... are not seen to be great. You can get a job as a teacher, some people might want to teach but if they're going to get a job in teaching and there's nothing else they will take it. So there is a question of the porosity of occupational but the porosity of occupational choices", James implied. The other two factors that James described involved other fields of study such as business and sciences, generally having a larger and wider demand for talent compared to foreign language students, and also that the UWI level does not prepare students to master the field of study, as they should. In essence, the more overarching issues according to the educators, seem to stem from lack of vision and projection for new opportunities towards the students.

Resultantly, lesser importance is placed when asking the original question, of why this fades away. Therefore this certainly raises another question, which is what exactly does the Spanish curriculum prepare students for, if the students are almost completely unaware of possible opportunities? The Spanish Curriculum officers and the CPDD advise they focus on developing the individual's skills and abilities, but it's fair to inquire if they actually focus on how to utilize them in an appropriate manner at a post-educational stage. On a positive note, Morris in 1985 did mention the hope for Latin American literary studies to be implemented, which has evidently been the case at UWI nowadays for example. One can certainly argue that the teachers themselves, though instructed to follow the relevant syllabi, do have the powerful impact to determine the effectiveness of how the content is delivered. In total concordance with Morris, "Without the teacher's total involvement from the initial stages, any attempt at curriculum change will flounder"<sup>10</sup>. Millien, for example, emphasized three important methodologies she focuses on to improve this effectiveness. The first would be heavy emphasis on curriculum integration, i.e. pulling from other departments or other disciplines to integrate into the classroom. "For example, Physical Education, being integrated with topics such as sports or even HFLE, home and family life education, pulling from the topic of family in Spanish.", she commented. The other two aim to focus on having a student-centered approach rather than a teacher-centered one, as well as the implementation of technology. In agreement with the third methodology, James "you can have Spanish, English dictionaries and encyclopedias also...there are translation apps for you to make sure that your Spanish is at the cutting edge now." Moreover, it seems from the educational perspective that the results from observing these existing policies and curriculum can be a possible reason for the overall contemplated statistical

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<sup>10</sup> Morris, Jenette "Curriculum Development in Trinidad and Tobago - Modern Languages - Practice, Problems, Probability - Past, Present and Future". *Caribbean Curriculum*, vol. 1, no. 1, (Sept. 2015): 41-53. <https://journals.sta.uwi.edu/ojs/index.php/cc/article/view/747>.

decline. This may be due to the content of the curriculum, but also the lack of long term objectives and projections placed on the students in the future, especially with the resources available.

### **Chapter 3: Impact**

This third and final chapter seeks to simply and briefly understand the inevitable regional and global impact that this phenomenon of less importance placed on foreign language study, can have principally by placing the focal point on limited career opportunities, cultural/economic isolation and the underutilization of regional resources. Although Chapter 2 includes a suggestion that there is a lack of clarity when it comes to job opportunities and the job market, Trinidad & Tobago, and by extension the Caribbean region, is living in a time where certain sectors which require foreign language skill are flourishing. The emphasis is on what impact the mentality of these students has, when deciding to pursue other fields of study, and students in Trinidad who underestimate the value of learning foreign languages might encounter limited job opportunities, especially in sectors like tourism. Statistics from the World Travel and Tourism Council's (WTTC) Economic Impact 2023 report certainly establishes evidence of this.

According to the report, the first chart that highlights nations in the Americas in which the travel and tourism sector has contributed to the GDP more in 2023 than in 2019, and even after the global COVID-19 pandemic, Trinidad and Tobago finds itself in the list. However the real issue is revealed when the 2nd chart indicates the number of jobs in this sector in this twin island has

not increased.<sup>11</sup> This declining attitude among students, unaware of the importance of linguistic skills and the mastery of languages such as Spanish, French, or Portuguese, could result in missed chances for positions in hospitality, customer service, and trade. On the other hand, disregarding the significance of learning foreign languages can also isolate Trinidad and Tobago culturally and economically within the Caribbean and Latin American region. This prevailing attitude among students undermines the nation's ability to engage meaningfully with the linguistic and cultural diversity of neighboring countries. For instance, proficiency in Spanish enables Trinidadian students to access a wide array of literary works, films, and academic resources produced in these languages, especially in Latin American studies. When examining the impact of this decline, a suggestion is that this may negatively contribute to the desire to ensure the development of an intellectual society. Failure to recognize the importance of language skills may also hinder Trinidad's participation in regional initiatives and limit its capacity to benefit from economic opportunities. For example, Trinidad's involvement in regional trade agreements or collaborations with Latin American partners may be hindered by language barriers, impacting the nation's economic growth and integration into regional networks. Last but not least, neglecting foreign language education results in the underutilization of the wide vast of linguistic and cultural resources available in the Caribbean. This prevailing mindset among students leads to missed opportunities to tap into the diverse cultural and intellectual offerings of neighboring countries. For instance, Trinidad's ability to fully engage in regional integration efforts, such as CARICOM initiatives or collaborations with neighboring countries, may be compromised by a lack of language skills. Another example of how the geographical factor steps in would be the heavy influx of Venezuelan immigrants currently in

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<sup>11</sup> Garcia, Olga Gomez. "Has the Region's Tourism Sector Already Overcome the Pandemic's Impact?" *Iadb.Org*, (2023). <https://blogs.iadb.org/caribbean-dev-trends/en/has-the-regions-tourism-sector-already-overcome-the-pandemics-impact/>.

Trinidad & Tobago, where opportunities to assist or accommodate are created through various programmes and drives. By failing to recognize the importance of foreign language proficiency, students and Trinidad as a whole may miss out on valuable opportunities for cultural exchange, academic collaboration, and regional cooperation, hampering efforts toward regional development and mutual understanding.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research project has provided valuable insights into the dynamics surrounding the declining importance of foreign language learning in Trinidad and Tobago's post-secondary education system. Through an in-depth exploration of student perspectives, educational policies, and regional implications, several key findings have emerged. Firstly, the prevailing attitude among students towards foreign language proficiency reveals a significant disconnect between the perceived value of language skills and their real-world application in career development and regional engagement. This attitude not only limits individual opportunities for advancement but also hampers the nation's ability to fully integrate into the globalized world and engage meaningfully with neighboring countries in the Caribbean and Latin American region. Secondly, insights from educators underscore the challenges inherent in promoting foreign language education within the existing educational framework.

Furthermore, the implications of this downward trend extend beyond the confines of Trinidad and Tobago, impacting broader regional cooperation and integration efforts. As the Caribbean and Latin American region continues to strive for economic development and cultural exchange, a lack of proficiency in foreign languages poses a significant barrier to achieving these goals. Embracing multilingualism and recognizing the importance of language diversity is crucial for fostering mutual understanding and collaboration among countries in the region. In light of these findings, it is imperative that policymakers, educators, and stakeholders in Trinidad and Tobago take proactive steps to address the challenges surrounding foreign language education. This may include revisiting curriculum frameworks, investing in teacher training programs, and promoting cultural exchange initiatives to foster a greater appreciation for language diversity. Altogether, it's difficult to draw conclusions, however it is essential to observe how the phenomena progresses.

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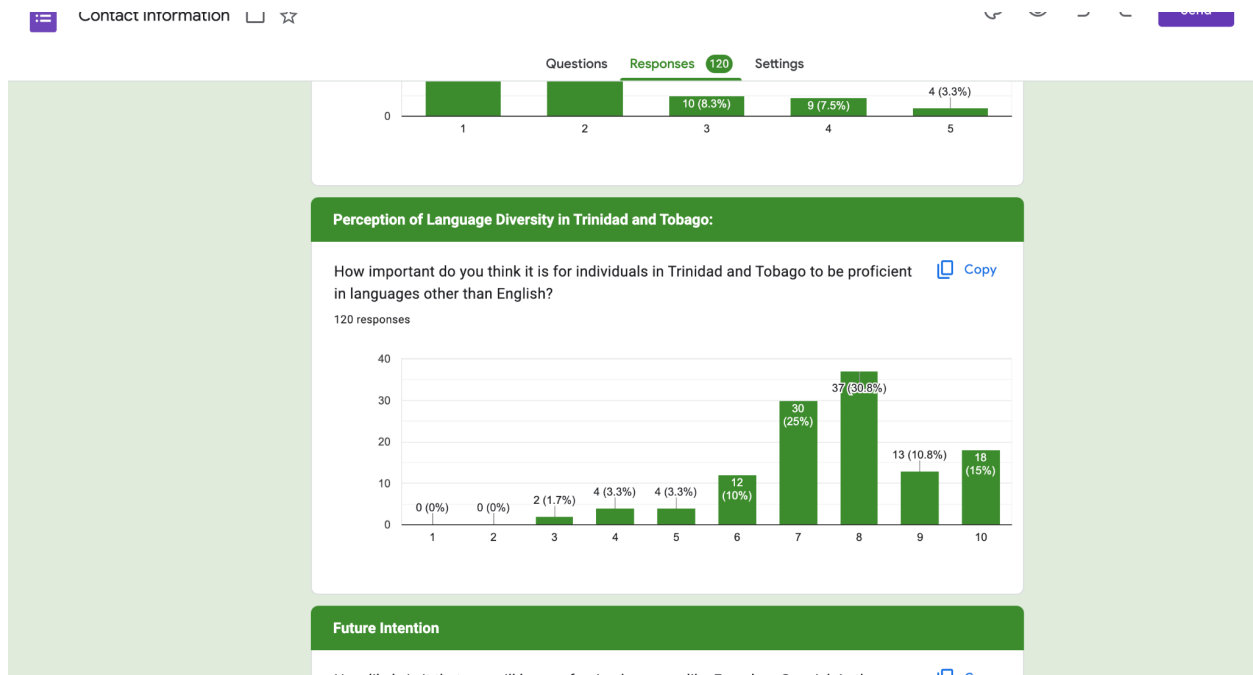
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**APPENDIX A**

Image of results from survey, question being Language Perception:



## APPENDIX B

Audio & Transcript of phone call interview with Dr. Winford James :

Audio:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/k4tywx1wt0voa18z9frwc/winford-full.mp3?rlkey=kjk98x4ao6t8y480bcht6dzy&dl=0>

Transcript:

**Duane**: Hi, good morning, Dr. James, how are you doing?

**Winford**: Hello. How can I help?

**Duane**: Alright, I just have a few questions for you regarding your experience in terms of foreign language, educational policies, techniques within the classroom as well as the impact from students. I basically did a bit of research and it's correct that you would have studied at the University of Salamanca etc? I actually spent about six months in Valladolid

**Winford**: Where? Oh Valladolid? Yeah.

**Duane**: Yeah Salamanca wasn't too far away.

**Winford**: So you got certification for that time?

**Duane**: Yeah yeah correct.

**Winford**: Okay so that was what a session involving people from all over the Caribbean?

**Duane:** That's actually the program itself, was with UWI, it's an exchange program called Erasmus. Well it's not really an exchange because students don't really come from there to here, but it is more like a mobility program. So one of the first questions like I would like to ask you know based on your experience and stuff, like are you able to provide or describe like a current overview of the guidelines or policies given to I'll say secondary schools teachers as well as lecturers when it comes to the teaching of foreign languages specifically Spanish do you have like an overarching idea of how the policies and guidelines are?

**Winford:** Well, I suppose the simple answer is no. But it's a no that is qualified. It's no because I have not taught Spanish to anybody, since the early 1990s, I went off to do a PhD and the PhD was not in relation to foreign languages, it was related to language in education. There was a lot of linguistics involved, you know. But I was part of a group that reviewed the English language syllabus for primary schools and a lot of the principles that you're referring to are resident in what comes as the teaching of ELA, English language arts. But before I go on to that let me just say, I was part of a textbook evaluation committee. So we used to look at the textbooks, the foreign language textbooks that were being used in different schools across the country. And that involved of course in the selection of a textbook, we had to go through policies and procedures and what, whether the textbooks were in line with what the government's policies were to be, and without policies, we had to go through that and make the selection, in relation to the policies of the Ministry of Education.

**Duane:** I wanna get into a bit, well about the textbook selection experience. How was that process in terms of what the government was offering on the syllabus or syllabi, was it extremely difficult to match what was the content or delivery to what the government was trying to implement?

**Duane:** No, sorry. I mean, that was one of the questions. But I want to get into a little bit of the textbook selection experience. So how was that process, in the sense of what the government was offering on the syllabus or the syllabi, was it extremely difficult to match what was the content or delivery in the textbook with what the government was trying to implement?

**Winford:** No, I don't think so at all. There were some very good offerings by the way. Very good offerings on the market and obviously some of the textbook writers or textbook vendors, if not writers, were more interested in getting their books on the syllabus, on the book list, sorry, so that they could make some money. But we had to use a syllabus and match the syllabus with what the particular textbooks were offering. So there was a Spanish syllabus, this is at the secondary level. There was also the CXC syllabus, which would've been, shall we say, adopted by the various schools across the Caribbean. Because if you're tested on the CXC syllabus you have to incorporate that into your own teaching.

**Duane:** So for now it's more like a personal question in terms of your opinion or your perspective. Despite the experience being so long (ago) and stuff, there are actually statistical suggestions that based on the research I've done so far as well as interviewing students and

teachers, there is definitely a statistical decline in students nowadays wanting to actually want to learn foreign language whether it be Spanish -

**Winford:** That has been so far a long time. What you might be interested in is if more people have been coming into French and Spanish since I stopped teaching but the question of low numbers, low enrollment figures, that has been very much the case in the teaching, learning of French and Spanish in Trinidad and Tobago. Yeah. I don't have the figures.

**Duane:** Okay. Okay, so in like your personal, like if you have to give a personal presumption or assumption, what do you think would be like the reasons? Because even if it was like low back in those days as well. Like what do you think would be possibly like a reason?

**Winford:** I like your question. I believe there are a number of reasons Yeah, one of them is that the employment opportunities are not particularly great or are not seen to be great. You can get a job as a teacher and some people might want to teach. But if they're going to get a job in teaching and there's nothing else they will take it. So there is a question of the lack of occupational choices. I mean you could learn, you can go further and possibly do some interpretation, interpreting, you could get involved in that. You probably can go into a foreign country and teach English, yeah but but you are using your knowledge of Spanish to get into that system yeah you know depending on your teaching methodology. You follow what I'm saying? But the choices that you could go to work in other jobs in the public service, so there is a question of the job appeal of Spanish and French right? You could go to the UN too I suppose and do some work with the UN. So you have that lack of job appeal so to speak. That's one I think. That some people find the area difficult in terms of mastery they just speak of mastery, except when they leave and they go out into a Spanish speaking country and spend some time there. What is taught to them and what they learn at UWI is not sufficient I don't think and in the first place learning the grammar for foreign language is not the easiest of things. A third reason is that it is not sexy. There are other subject areas, economics for example, if you can get into the right stations; finance and accounting, these things are in greater demand and perhaps just as MDA's became sexy in this country, even though the people who get the MDA's come out with a very loose understanding of it, but an MDA is a sexy thing. I thought I would go and do it just in case kind of and they have been as we say in the language knocking down all over the place so I'm identifying the lack of sexiness of doing, I mean comparatively speaking, of doing French and Spanish, when there is more pragmatic choices to be made, you know, like doing finance and accounting, right, and subjects like that. Yeah, people, it's the practicality of the choice. People don't see, "what's the point of that? What are you doing that for?" People don't see that you can do other things with foreign languages. So they say, well, "I really want to do a degree in engineering, I want to do a degree in accounting, I want to do you know that kind of thing". Yeah. So those are three reasons I would say are responsible for the low end enrollment rates.

**Duane:** Yeah, I think that stigma actually still exists in today's world, you know, a lot of people still ask me, you know, like, okay, you know, you study in Spanish, you know, "what do you plan to do with this?". Or "how do you, how are you going to use it?" And it is actually a very good question in a sense, you know, because the same thing you said in terms of job opportunities, you know, it would be higher outside of Trinidad, but also, so I'm currently working at a job in Chaguanas. This is an IT company, and I've never studied IT, except for CXC, but...

**Winford:** IT is another sexy area too, yes.

**Duane:** Yep, but at the same time, the role that I am in is a bilingual role, it's meant to support Latin America and Spain, you know, so...

**Winford:** And this (includes) other languages, Spanish or French?

**Duane:** This is Spanish. They also have French and Portuguese that I'm exposed to, but it's mainly Spanish. So, you know, I'm saying basically that even though the stigma exists, I think like, something like accounting that is in high demand, I think languages definitely should be, you know, up there as well, you know.

**Winford:** Yeah, but people are not seeing it that way. Yeah, maybe the time will come when that stigma will be reduced if not removed entirely. Yeah, I mean, hopefully... I think everybody in this country should be bilingual at least, but in your sense of it, that is to say everybody, when I say everybody, of course, I'm being excessive, but you know what I mean? I think everybody should be speaking Spanish.

**Duane:** Yeah, I agree. I think it should be an official language, a second language of the country. I believe it is, but in terms of implementing it at a much earlier age, I think that is necessary.

**Winford:** There was a program that was teaching Spanish elementary school. Okay, right. You move on to the secondary school, but you have to find teachers who could do that, who could teach at the primary school. Who knew enough Spanish to be able to make the right selections and make the right foci. I'm just saying, I don't know where that program has gone since. Yes, there was a time when we were naming streets. If you are around the country, they are named as a particular project. Don't mind that some of the Spanish is faulty. It used to be at least when I used to check these things. You know, but yeah, so I'm happy that you are with this IT company and it involves in part your knowledge of Spanish, your ability to speak, your ability to write it and so on. And then of course, there are online programs that can have you refresh your knowledge all the time.

**Duane:** Yep. That is the advantage we have with the technol-. No, sorry. I was just saying that that that is correct as the advantage that we have with the technology, you know.

**Winford:** Yeah, you can have Spanish, English dictionaries and encyclopedias also. Yeah. And there are translation apps for you to make sure that your Spanish is at the cutting edge now. Yeah. Yeah. You are making sure that you really don't make mistakes, you know.

**Duane:** Yeah. Oh, definitely.

**Winford:** The learning of Spanish and speaking of it. But, you know, the web does help you and the apps that they have these days to help you improve your command of the foreign language that you are using in the job that you have there.

**Duane:** Yeah, definitely.

**Winford:** So congratulations on that.

**Duane:** Thanks a lot. All right. I mean, I mean, I think that that pretty much wraps it up. I just wanted to get like an overview. But like I said, the curriculum officers themselves, I've done my research in terms of the curriculum, how it's evolved and stuff. If I can get a grab of Mr. Cornwall, as soon as he's back, I will. But I think you really provided me with some insightful information in terms of the committee and, you know, you really reinforced some of the points of basically why the numbers are so low.

**Winford:** I think those are three points that have been low for forever.

**Duane:** Yeah. I think those are three points that have been, you know, have been, it's been circulated and have been hearing over and over, you know.

## APPENDIX C

Audio & Transcript of 1 on 1 interview with Ms. Kayla Millien:

Audio:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/v59rur5lqs7hgaanym1hf/kayla-full.mp3?rlkey=f1ble74xa91qvl7g4zvr3szns&dl=0>

Transcript:

**Duane:** Hi, good morning. So today we're interviewing Kayla Millien who's actually a secondary school teacher at the SJC San Fernando. She teaches forms one through six. She has been teaching for about five or six years now, three years at Convent, in which before she had some

experiences in CIC and Fatima. But yeah, we're here. I'm going to ask her student questions based on her experience as a secondary school teacher about basically the curriculum received, as well as teaching methods and delivery to students, effectiveness, etc. how methods, patterns have changed over the years.

**Duane:** All right, so Kayla, thank you so much for doing this, for agreeing to do this interview. How are you today?

**Kayla:** Thank you. I'm good.

**Duane:** All right. Perfect. All right. So I'm going to start off. I just have some questions regarding curriculum, Spanish curriculum, as well as certain methods within the classroom and student integration and stuff. My first question to you is, do you believe, like, are there any specific teaching methodologies emphasized in this Spanish, like, secondary school curriculum as compared to others?

**Kayla:** I think so, certainly. Three methodologies come to mind. So for example, the first one I would say is a heavy emphasis on curriculum integration that is pulling from other departments or other disciplines to integrate into the classroom. For example, physical education, being integrated with topics such as sports or even HFLE (home and family life education, pulling from families, the topic of family in Spanish) Another methodology that I would say is particular to Spanish is having a student -centered approach as opposed to, like, teacher -centered. So we really try to emphasize on the student as a learner and the teacher as a guide on the side. And then thirdly, I think another methodology that is very pertinent to today is the integration of technology in the classroom. So you have different platforms and ways that students can interface and interact with the teacher. And the good thing about the benefit of it is that it can work outside of the classroom as well when students are at home and they can interface on different platforms, different platforms, whether it be for extra work or homework and so on.

**Duane:** Okay. All right. I think that definitely answers the question of the methodologies. The thing about it is that it leads to my next question in a sense where, do you believe there are certain challenges or certain things that prevent wanting to implement new ideas, especially, I heard you mentioned, for example, with the technology, implementing technology. Do you think that wanting to implement new ideas or modifying the current curriculum, how it is, do you think there are certain challenges to prevent it?

**Kayla:** Yes, definitely. With the technology integration, it's a wonderful tool, technology that is to help students with learning and so on. Of course, with schools, there is a problem of the availability of resources, right? So not every school is equipped with laptops or computers, as well as access to Wi -Fi. Some of the platforms that, well, I use a lot in my classroom, such as Kahoot and Canva and so on, sometimes I really do need the current Wi -Fi access to work. So I think that's one of the major challenges to implementing this, the availability of resources. And a little bit in certain schools, there may be a little rigidity or maybe unwillingness from other departments to help out. For example for curriculum integration, it's all well and good to borrow from some departments, their skills and so on, but sometimes you have unwillingness from other teachers and other departments.

**Duane:** I guess that could probably really be a serious hindrance. So another question regarding the... ,now I know you said that you teach forms one through five. Just at the end of that form three stage is like getting to the beginning of form four when students have to select subjects. Based on your experience as a teacher at that stage, how motivated do you observe or you see students to be in their willingness to select a foreign language like Spanish or French, but specifically Spanish as a subject in form four?

**Kayla:** Okay, so from my experience, languages at a form four level and so on is compulsory in our school, right? And you do find that the majority of students choosing Spanish over French, right? So it's more a matter that they have to do it. However, I do find that students... from forms one to three are quite motivated in terms of they like the languages, particularly Spanish. They like the languages, however, I think the drawback there is that they don't see it as a lucrative subject to study further. So for example, in terms of career, they are more focused on, of course they are more focused on careers such as medicine and law and their priorities in terms of studies or their focus is going to go more on subjects such as biology, chemistry, business and so on. And so Spanish, it's not that they don't like Spanish, but in terms of really doing well in Spanish, the emphasis is more on the other subjects than Spanish. So students don't really see Spanish as a subject that they can use in their career paths, even though we try to persuade them and say, that you know it can be a very huge asset to their careers. I think another factor that contributes to this is that the parents themselves also kind of demotivate students because they are so focused on the careers such as a doctor, lawyer and so on. So they essentially do not encourage or influence their daughters to continue with the languages and they kind of tell them to know not worry about Spanish.

**Duane:** Yeah yeah yeah I actually have some friends that have the exact situation but they you know they see they prioritize other other things and they really see the importance of this. But that that also kind of leads to my next question which would kind of allude to like as an educator yourself like how do you feel about there could be a statistical suggestion, as a matter of fact, that over the years the number of students selecting to do for example Spanish has been declining or wanting to do Spanish after a secondary school for example in university or post -secondary education you know they don't really see it whether as a main subject or something on the side. So how as an educator, how do the educators, if you can speak on behalf of educators, how do the educators feel about this statistical decline of students?

**Kayla:** If this is true I think that it's a really unfortunate situation that students do not recognize their power and the cutting edge that they can have, should they choose to pursue the language or even master it right. And it's unfortunate they do not know that they can use the language in tandem with any career path that they choose, right? It's only so much that teachers and educators can say, right, by telling them that it is important, but it's ultimately their choice, right. So, for example, in my experience, even in the case of those who receive a passing grade at the CXC level or CSEC level, a lot of it is forgotten afterwards once they do not use it or once they do not further it, as it is something that needs to be continuously used and practiced. There have also been instances where some students and promising students wished that they could have

further it at the CAPE level and the university level. However, their career path just did not allow for it, right. In my own experience, I do find that, you know, there's a limited number of students who choose to do it at the CAPE level. Like I said, it's compulsory at the CSECI level, but the number is a vast difference at Cape level. For example, right now, I have, in lower six, four students for Spanish, and for upper six, I have seven students. However, these students, these 11 students, are still not sure of what they want to do in their tertiary education. Right?

**Duane:** All right, so the last question I really have for you is that if you personally could have broken the barrier, you could have broken the rules. If you could personally implement something, and it's not really about breaking the rules, but it is really about introducing or implementing a certain idea or change in the curriculum or in the education, how it's projected to the students. If there is any, what change would you make?

**Kayla:** I'm not sure if this is a change, or if it's something that has already been implemented in schools. So, for example, I would have recently attended a language day at Presentation College, and of course at my school, we're thinking to have one. So if this could be like a mandatory event held every year in every school, I think that could really motivate students and open their eyes to the opportunities that they can have. But not just learning French or Spanish, but of course other languages as well, right? But of course, mainly French or Spanish at their level. And a Language Day where they can appreciate other cultures and see how the languages can take them with, paired with their own career choices.

**Duane:** Okay. Yeah. All right. Well, I believe that should be all for now. Thank you a lot for the insight. I think I would have basically grasped exactly what I was inquiring on, in terms of the curriculum and the changes, the current state, etc. So thanks a lot, Kayla, for doing this interview. And yeah, let's hope to see better changes in the future.

**Kayla:** Great. Thank you so much.

**Duane:** All right, thank you. Thank you.